Animal Academy

はこぶね白書 HAKOBUNE HAKUSHO

7

MOYAMU FUJINO

Volume 7

by

MOYAMU FUJINO

Animal Academy: Hakobune Hakusho Volume 7
Created by Moyamu Fujino

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[7]

HAKOBUNE
はこぶね
HAKUSHU
白舟

Cartoon by

MOYAMU FUJINO

藤野もやむ

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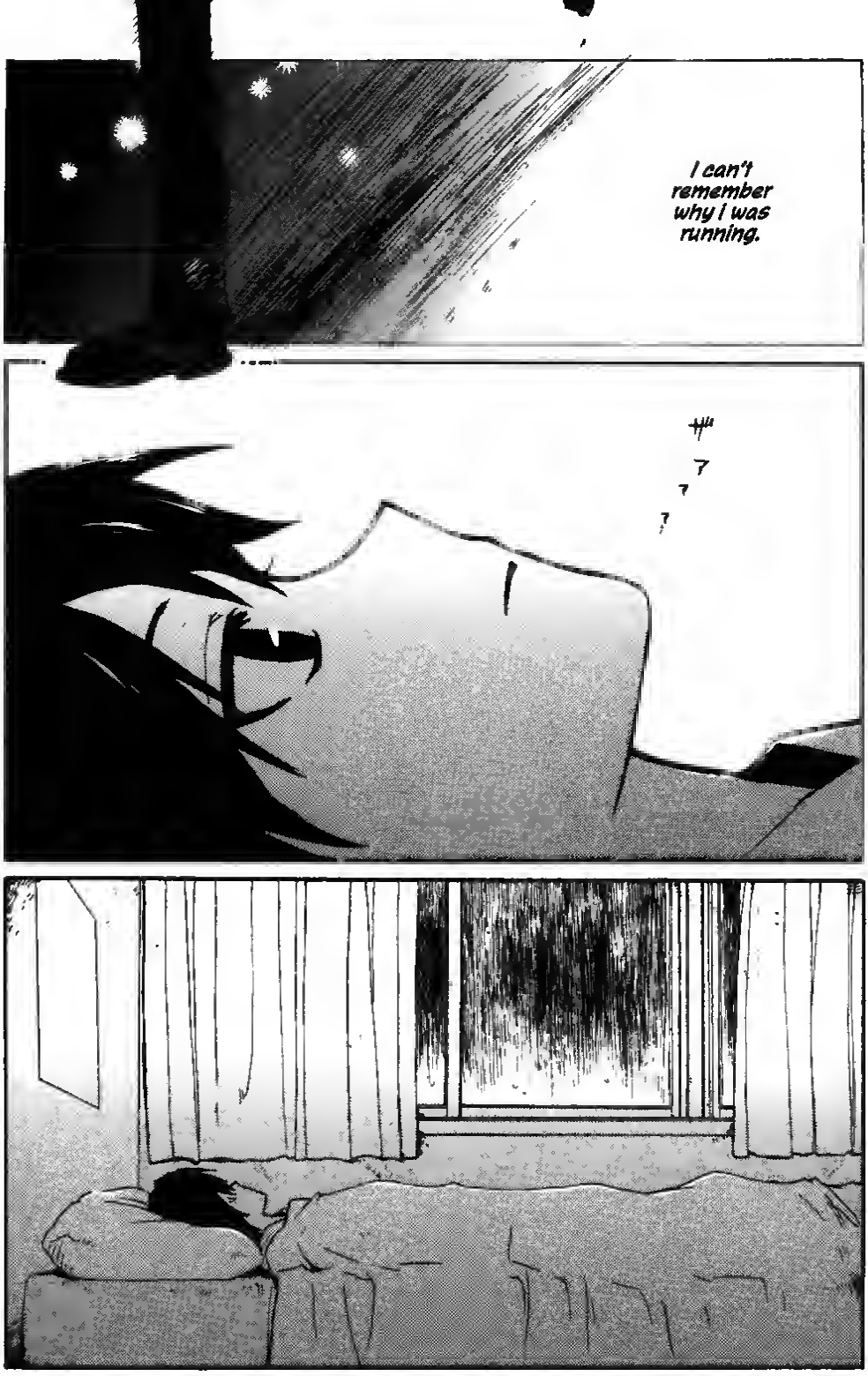

I can't remember why I was running.

Report.29 Everything Vanishes

I told Sasuke-kun how I feel about him.
White-1
He should be in the infirmary...
...so I'm heading over there.
I hope he's okay.
And then...he collapsed.
Well, not right in front of me.
I've been thinking about it
He's...
...right around this corner--
Just a quick visit and small talk before I head back to class.
Maybe I'll say "Wow, look at all the rain," or "I hope the sun comes out."
I just want to see how he is.

Y. Iken-.
Nu.

Y-Yusuke-kun...
Hi.
Huh. It's, Fukuta-san.
Here to see Sasuke?
Morning.
Oh!
Yep.
No idle chit-chat for you, huh?
I heard he was resting here.

Well, there's no point going in.
Huh?
He's not here.

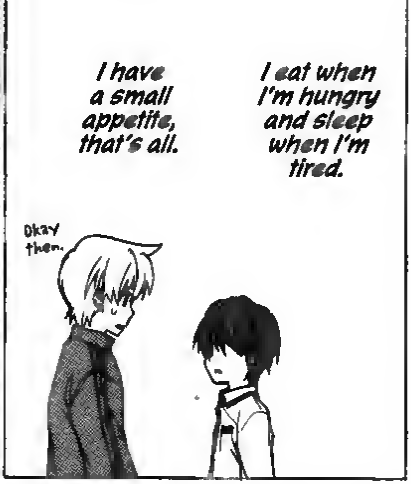
Nurse
That's his double sleeping in there.
.....!

Why's the headmaster standing there?
Who knows?
I do my best to avoid her.
There's definitely something going on with her.
Y-yeah.
Yusuke-kun thinks so too, huh?
.....
Back to Sasuke.
Where do you think he went?

You don't know?
Would I be asking if I knew?
Use your brain!
Maybe he got hungry...
What d'you mean by...
...
"double"
...?
He could've gone for a snack? Nah, that doesn't sound right...
Kurou, that black cat.
He's been Sasuke's partner for years. He's a sneaky one.
Didn't I mention that?
Sensei said he just needed rest. Maybe he went back to class?
He left his double there...
...so I doubt it.
I wonder where Sasuke-kun went...?
That's what I'm trying to figure out!
Oh, forget it.
You're right that he'd be hungry, though.
Maybe he's passed out somewhere.

Yeah.
I should just get a rope around his neck.
How about no?
Too dangerous!
You don't sound like you're kidding.
Don't you think?
We've got class right now.
Our fight yesterday was pretty half-assed.
We should've settled things for good.
You guys fought?
Well, how about a race?
Let's see who can find Sasuke first.
You told him you liked him, right?
Find him and get an answer out of him.

We'll start as soon as class gets out!
It'll be more interesting this way!
Huh?!
But what if I can't find him?
Does that mean he's avoiding me?
What should I do?
Sure, I want to see him, but...
But what should I...
You don't seem to be eating much. Everything all right?
Has something been bothering you?
I'm fine.


I have a small appetite, that's all.
I eat when I'm hungry and sleep when I'm tired.
Okay then.

Let's see...

Idiot.

So Sasuke-kun's human, and his brother, Yusuke-kun, was sent to Morimori on a secret mission.
I must be the only person in class who knows Sasuke-kun disappeared during eighth grade.
Is Sasuke-kun here on some kind of job too?
They said being a ninja is all about keeping secrets.
Does that mean it's a problem that I want to know more about him?
Is copying what's on the board that hard ...?
Whether it made you happy or not, just come back, Sasuke-kun!
Well, take your time if you need to.
Well, what's done is done.
And I told him...
.....

I'll do my best!
Good
"I'll make sure you don't have to leave this school."
"I won't let everything be ruined."
"I'm all right, Fukuta-san."
"I'm sorry for getting you caught up in all this."
This weird anxiety.
I've been feeling this since Takuma-kun left...
...I think.

Class dismissed
...I can't help worrying.
But...
What am I thinking?
Wait-- Sasuke-kun isn't going to disappear too, is he?
But maybe it started back when I didn't get into any high schools.
My head was spinning when I graduated.
Then I met Miiko on the first day of school...
..and then Kotaro.

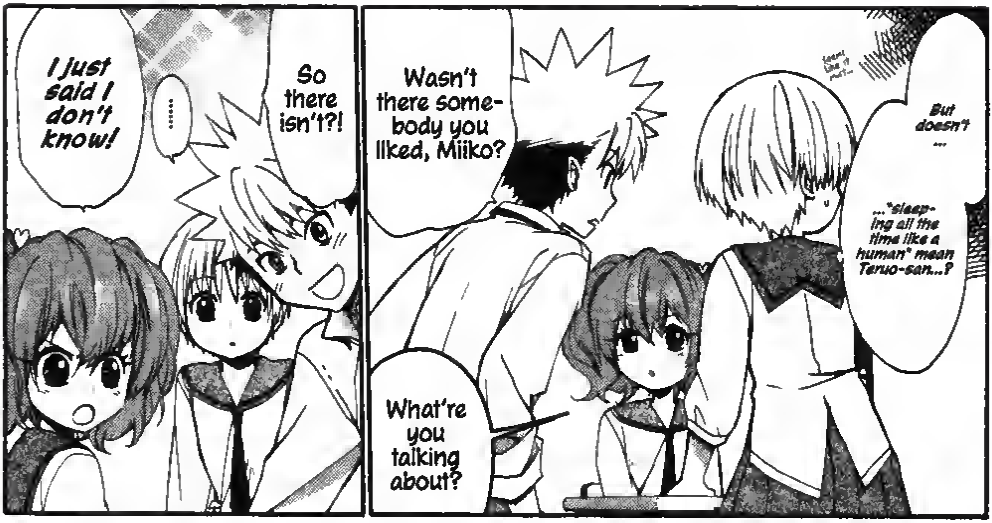
How did he collapse, anyway?
Uh...
He toppled over and *wham*!
Right after a big roll of thunder.
I don't need an answer. I just want to see him!
Think Sasuke's still resting?
S-i-g-h...!!
Is he scared of thunder?
Was Sasuke friends with Yuichi?
Thunder?
Nah, never mind.
?
He's just like a human.

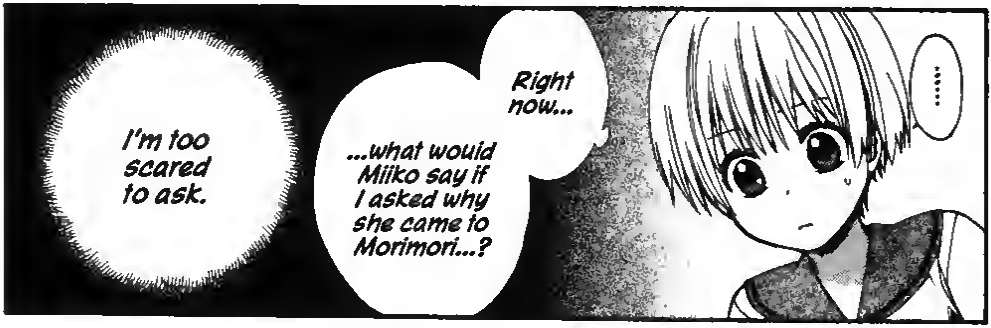
Huh?
Sleeping all the time.
That's what humans do.
.....
Oh...
Like Teruo-san?
Is that what you mean?

Who's Teruo-san?
Huh?
.....
What?!
What do you--
ガタッ
I did notice it was gone.

Miiko hasn't worn her pouch since all that happened.
You really...
Um... But...
...loved him...
Er...
That's not really what I'm getting at.
I love snakes and rats and fish and crispy stuff and grass...
All those things.
That's all food, isn't it?
Maybe she's trying not to think about him.
Loved ...?
... S-sorry.
Like how I love Miiko?
Right?
Yeah, exactly.
It's not like your favorite food.
Then what do you mean?
Well... Um...

"I couldn't stand it if Miiko dropped out."
"A long, twisty snake."
"I wish it could wrap around all of Miiko's sad feelings..."
"...and pull them all away into the center of the earth."
"I want to see him."
But...
...you were so...
"I want to be with Teruo."
"I want to tell him I love him!"


I just said I don't know!
So there isn't?!
Wasn't there somebody you liked, Miiko?
What're you talking about?
But doesn't ...
...sleeping all the time like a human mean Teruo-san...?


I'm too scared to ask.
Right now...
...what would Miiko say if I asked why she came to Morimori...?

But Miiko ...
...really went through ...
...a lot.
Today I'm going to tell you...
...all about it.

How could she forget?
Did i do something...?
In autumn, humans have a culture festival.

"Fune, if you like Sasuke-kun..."
"...then we're kind of the same, huh?"
But...
But before we start brainstorming...
I want to discuss what we should do for the festival.
Yeah, just thinking about it won't do any good.
Anyway ... I won't know unless I ask.
Infirmary
Sagami left a little while ago.
He's right. Kurou's gone.
Hey, did he leave in human form?
Huh? Yeah.
.....
I see...
That's good.

They have free time after class.
I think I'll go look for Sasuke-kun.
He wasn't in the infirmary?
As soon as class gets out!
Oh!
Nope.
He left, but he's gotta be around...
But where?
This isn't about getting an answer.
It's like a game!
Whoever finds him is lucky for the day.
Lucky --?
All right! Let's go find him!
Well, it's more like...
...we'll be worried if we don't find him.
Or I will.

"I'm sorry about Takuma-kun."
KOFF
"It was my fault."
And then...?
What came after that?
What were you trying to tell Kotaro?
KOFF
KOFF

It's all your own fault, Sasuke. Why do you keep acting so weird?
Just go home and let Dad chew you out.
ピリピリ!
This'd be perfect if you actually planned to leave.
But I've switched your request to leave the school with one asking for a break. Get some rest.
What's the deal?
So...?
.....
No-thing.
And you were just getting to be friends, too.
Oh, really?
I don't care about that.
Kotaro-kun's too curious for his own good. It was getting annoying.
I figured it'd be better if he hated me.

What about Fukuta-san?
.....
Oh, I get it.
You wish Takuma were still here, huh?
If he hadn't left after he came face to face with his real self...
... Fukuta-san wouldn't have been sad.
.....
It was just a matter of time. It's not like anyone forced him to go.
Besides, he seemed pretty stubborn. Once he adjusted to his true nature, he might've cared more about the fact that they're different species.
Maybe by now he just wants to forget the whole thing.

Why does realizing you might be part of it scare you off like this?
When you analyze the web of relationships here, it all comes back to Fukuta-san, right?
Huh? I'm right?
That's not--
Shut up!
I don't deserve to be with Fukuta-san...
...In any way.

.....
"In any way"?
Right, then.
I know you feel like beating yourself up...
...but who cares?
You can't be friends with her like Takuma-kun was, and you can't be her boyfriend?
So you knew Takuma liked her, huh? Does that mean you were close to him?
No.
But...
...I knew.
Interesting

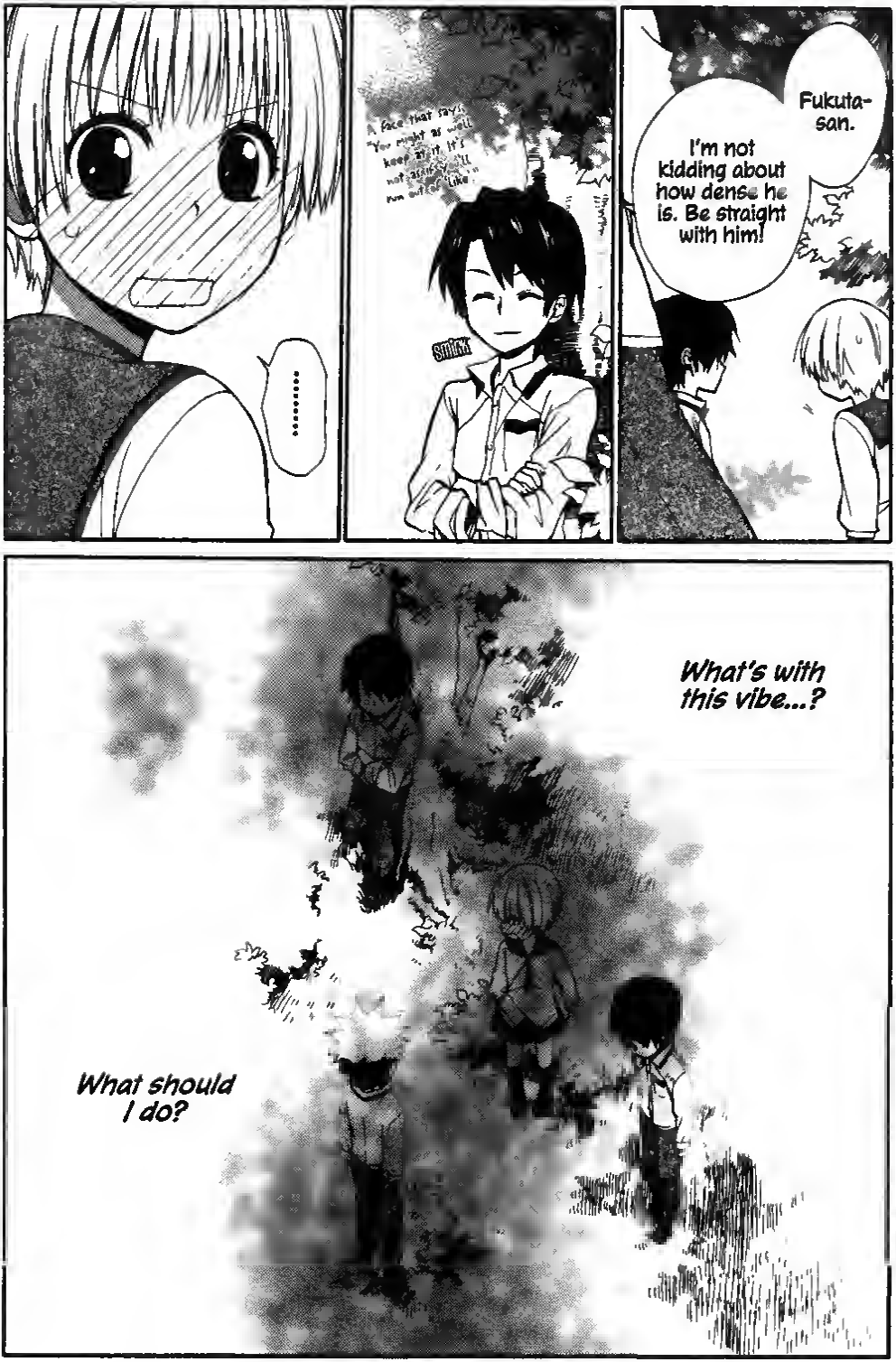
No matter what you say, I don't think you can escape me.
Anything else you wanna whine about?
!!
Oh...

Found you--
You get lucky?
.....
.....?
Fukuta-san...
You didn't notice?
Seriously?
PFT!
Heh heh heh...

Hey--!
...you two hold hands!
How about...
Oh, I know!
Let's call this a draw, okay, Fukuta-san?
ばっ
...!

Sorry.
.....
.....
Hey, didn't you say finding Sasuke...
...would make us lucky?

...why does this feel so awkward?
So...
It's dirty, see?
You're all muddy!
What's your problem?
What're you hiding?
Why'd you yank your hand back?
I keep thinking there's something strange about you, Sasuke.
Lucky?
Sasuke's Lucky?
Spectator
K-Kotaro!
Eeep!
You know she likes you.
Fune told you how she feels!
.....
Well, why aren't you happy?


Fukuta-san.
I'm not kidding about how dense he is. Be straight with him!
A face that says "You might as well keep at it. It's not going to kill you either. Like."
Smirk
.....
What's with this vibe...?
What should I do?

What'll happen if I do? This feels like a bad time. Yeah--I need the right kind of mood...
I just said I didn't care what his answer was. But maybe I should tell him again...?
Hmm...
Hmm...
I'm gonna tell him.
!!!
Yes?!
Fukuta-san.
.....
But what if he really doesn't like me--?
I'd rather get it settled once and for all.
Sasuke-kun...
Sa--
I can do it! C'mon, be a man! Er, a woman!

Hold on.
.../ /---
Don't do what Yusuke tells you to.
No need to force yourself to do this.

You'll forget about it soon enough anyway.
It'll all be okay.
.....

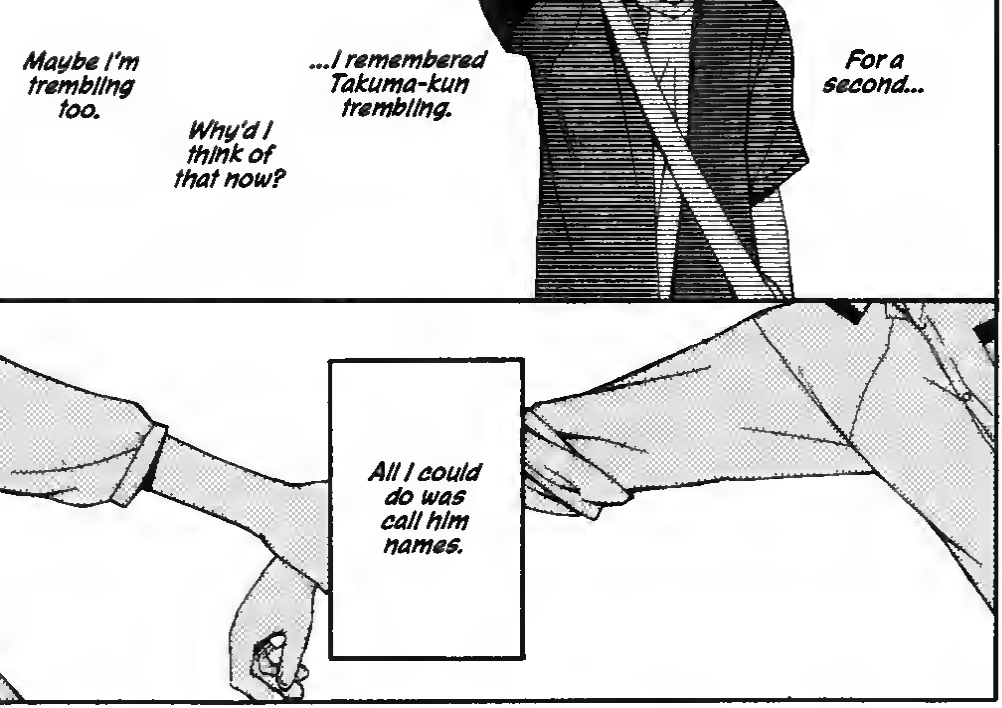
...!
"Okay"...?
What do you mean, "okay"?!!

You numbskull!
I...
...I've thought about this so hard, and... and...

……
ぐいっ
Hey! Fune--!
!

.....
What was that?
Everything went blank for a sec.

If he doesn't like me...
...he should just say so!
Did he really not hear me the first time?
Why'd I tell him how I felt, anyway?
Selfish jerk! I'm glad I hit him!



I'm such an idiot.

...hurts.
Sigh...

Rejec-tion...

Sigh...

.....

Fune?

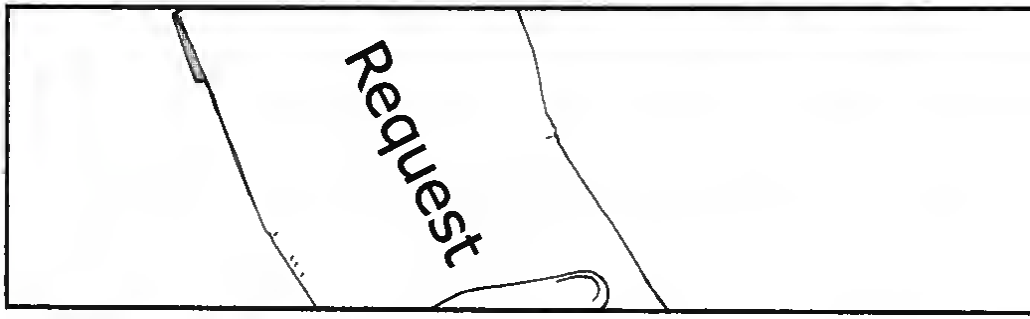
Why do I like him, anyway ...?
Why am I so stupid?
Why did I hit him?
I mean, I was happy to see him.
?
Why a cat...?
I'm back ...
...to the beginning.
...anything at all about Sasuke-kun.
It turns out I don't really know...
I wonder what he was talking to Yusuke-kun about...
Want to play with him?
You're getting warmer.
But...
No...
It's not that.
Do you want to eat him?
.....
Why do you like Sasuke-kun, Fune?

Miiko...
...change back into human shape.
You said you wanted to become human and learn how to talk...
Oh, man...
Everything's such a mess.
.....
...so you could tell him how you felt.

んっ
ぽ
……
……
……
ぎゅ
Hands off!!!
WHAM

What're you guys doing?
I thought this room was empty.
If you want to make noise, take it outside.
Oh!
The library is supposed to be quiet!
You're so cute, Miiko!
.....
.....
Oh, um...
What's wrong, Fukuta?
Noth-ing.
I can be so selfish sometimes...
Miiko, Kotaro...
...i'm sorry.

.....
I'm fine.
Excuse us!
Ex--
He'll know what I mean.
He's not here or in the art room.
Tell him it's about his request for a leave of absence.
Oh, hey.
If you see Sasuke, tell him to come talk to a teacher.


Request

He let you get trapped so he could escape?
"It'll all be okay."

If you could just talk, I could get some answers out of you.
……
This is how he repays your loyalty?
Sasuke sure has a cruel streak these days.
Don't you think, Kurou?
ドクン

...asking for a break from school.
That paper Sensei had was a note...
Sasuke might leave?
How do you know?
He might still be where we left--
He's not here...
.....

Well ...
...Sensei's looking for Sasuke-kun, so...
Blatant Excuse
Waaah!
Rejected!
Fune.
You were crying a whole lot.
Urgh...
This was the spot, right?
Yeah.
I want to ask him some-thing.
Me too.
I don't care!
So what if he thinks I'm too pushy?
I'm gonna find him!
Just you watch!
"Liking some-one"...
What does that mean?

You'll help, Miiko?!
...Sensei wants him?
...and tell him that...
So we just find him...
I'll help too.
...!
That's great! Thank you so much!
"I really like the way you smell, Fune."
You too, Kotaro!
Yeah, let's do it!

Let's split up, then.
I'll head over there.
I'll go this way.
.....?
あ?
Let's meet back here when we hear the school bell!
I'll check the forest!
Got it!

I'm not in this alone.
We've split up.
We can find him.

"It's a big school. One person can't look everywhere."

I searched for Miiko like this the other day.

I'll find Sasuke-kun!

Huff!

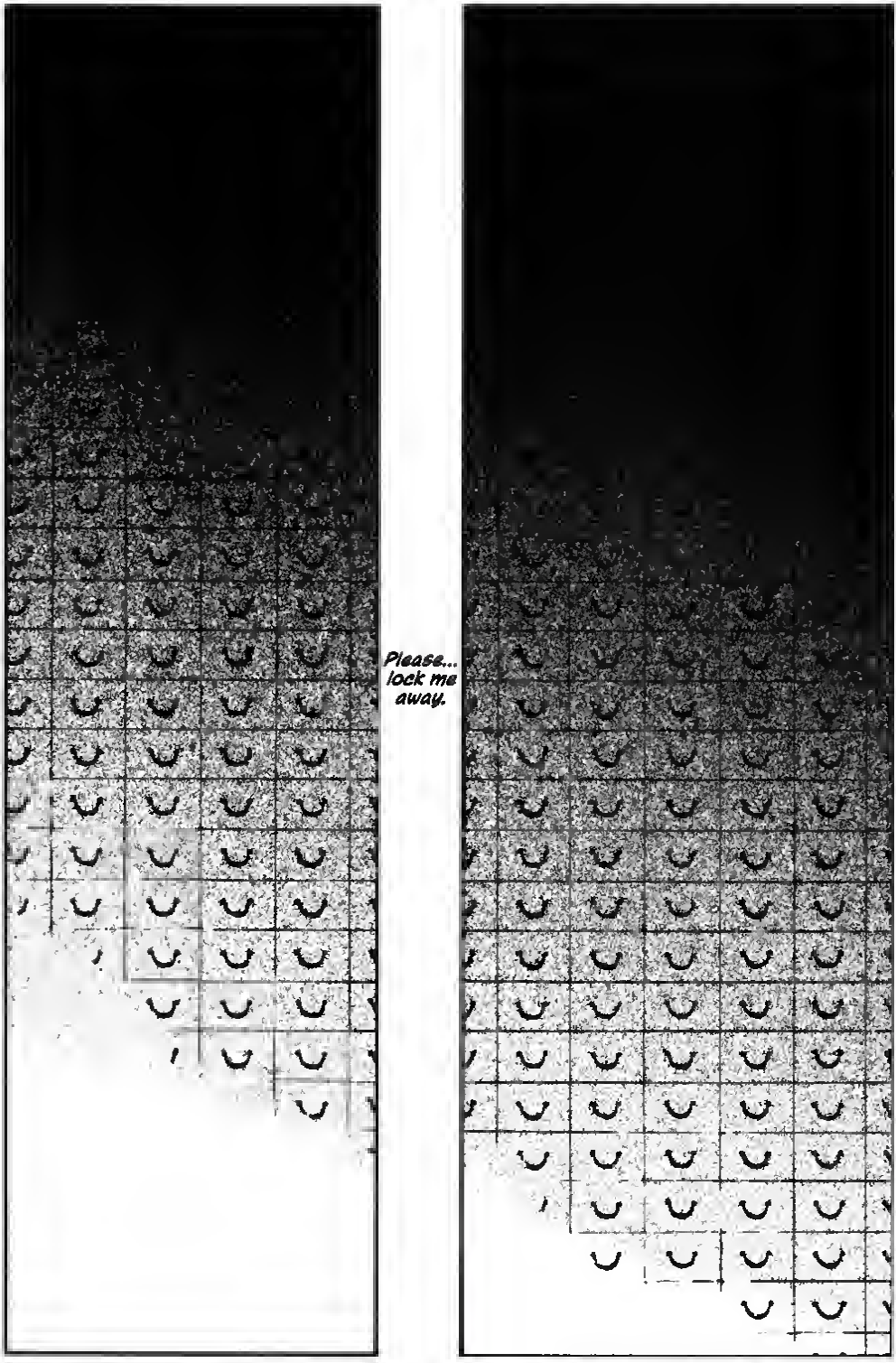
Huff!

Huff!

Lock
...
Huff!
Huff!
.....
Huff!
...me
...
...
away
...

I just...
...felt some-thing...
.....
Huh?

.....
Wait... what am i looking for?


Please... lock me away.

Report.30 Precious

It was the winter of eighth grade. That day, the wind coming down from the mountains was full of snow.
Despite the snow, the sky was clear.
The snowflakes were like a swarm of insects against the sunset.

Sasuke? I don't know where he is.
I came straight home from school and haven't seen him since.
Could he be...
...trying to find Mom again?
Isn't he getting too old for that?
Well, that's irritating.
Maybe he got lost on the way back?
He's your little brother.
Get out there and find him.
Do you really think jokes are appropriate?
We're having a family meal.
Right now?
Me?
Yes...
...Father.

The sun sets. Tomorrow comes.
It's the way of the world, but...
...I'm scared.
Why, though?
I can't get rid of this feeling. Why?
I thought I had it removed...!
It's so dark.
Where am I trying to go?

...!
I don't want to remember.

Uh...
...we were just doing something... right?
.....
.....?
I'm...
...searching for something, aren't I?

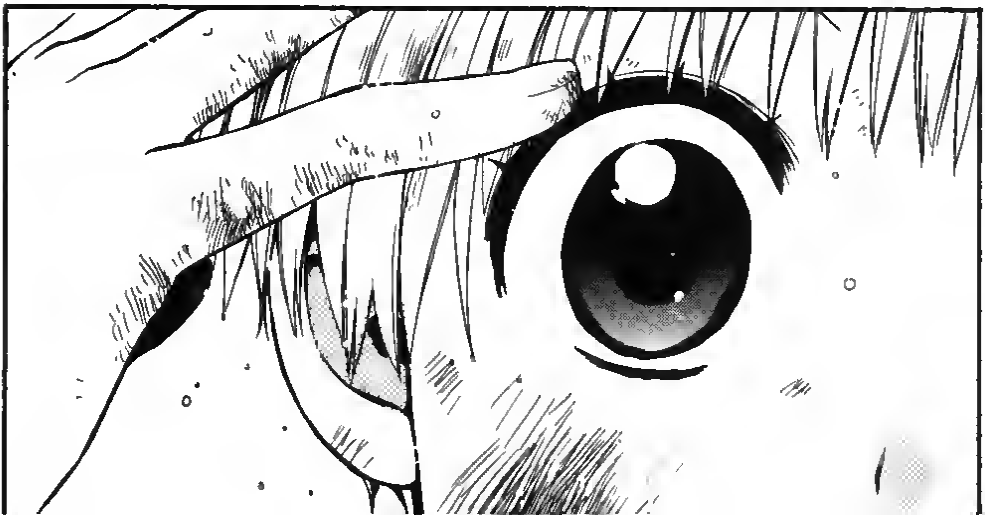
That's why...
...I'm out here, isn't it?
.....
Yikes! Light-ning!
What do I do...?
FLASH
Tall tree
Oh!
ゴゴゴ
ズッ
Gah--!

……
ぽつ…

……

.....
Huh?
.....
I'm gonna catch a cold at this rate...

ぺきゃ
……
Is there someone over there?
ザザ
ザザ
じー
……



This person...
This boy is...
Um...
You shouldn't...

...out here.
...be sleeping ...
He needs to...
... open his eyes!
Hello?
Hey!
Come on...
.....

Oh--!

.....
Sasuke-kun!

Fukuta-san...
What're you...doing here...?
Huh? Well, I was looking for you, and--
.....
Where are we?
!!
Everything's spinning!

When you see this, it means she's watching you.
Oh! Am I dreaming?
i-i had a dream like this--
I used to come here by picturing the spiral as hard as I could.
I mean...
...I begged her to...
...seal me away.
I was looking for you!
(Like I just said!)
That's strange.
...so how did you get here?
But I wasn't doing that now...
...it's supposed to stay that way forever.
And once something's been locked away...

.....
Locked away...?
What does that mean?
.....
Wait-- you're...
...the real Fukuta-san?
Uh... yes?

What are you doing here?!
Hurry!
You'll be trapped!
You have to get out!
But where are we?
Inside the spinning snake?
Exactly. We're inside her!
If you're here, you'll be pulled down too!
She's about to sink into the darkness!
...so I can tell.
Everything's getting darker and darker...

Who *is* she?
And...what about you, Sasuke-kun?
Why are you here?
I got her to lock a lot of things away.
.....
I...
I'm used to it...
...by now.

Heat...
...or cold...
...or pain.
.....
"Our headmaster has lived a very, very long time..."
"...and has remarkable powers."
"The headmaster can take away their negative feelings along with their ability to transform."
I don't know why, but...
...I'm not afraid of her.
I'll go into the darkness with her.

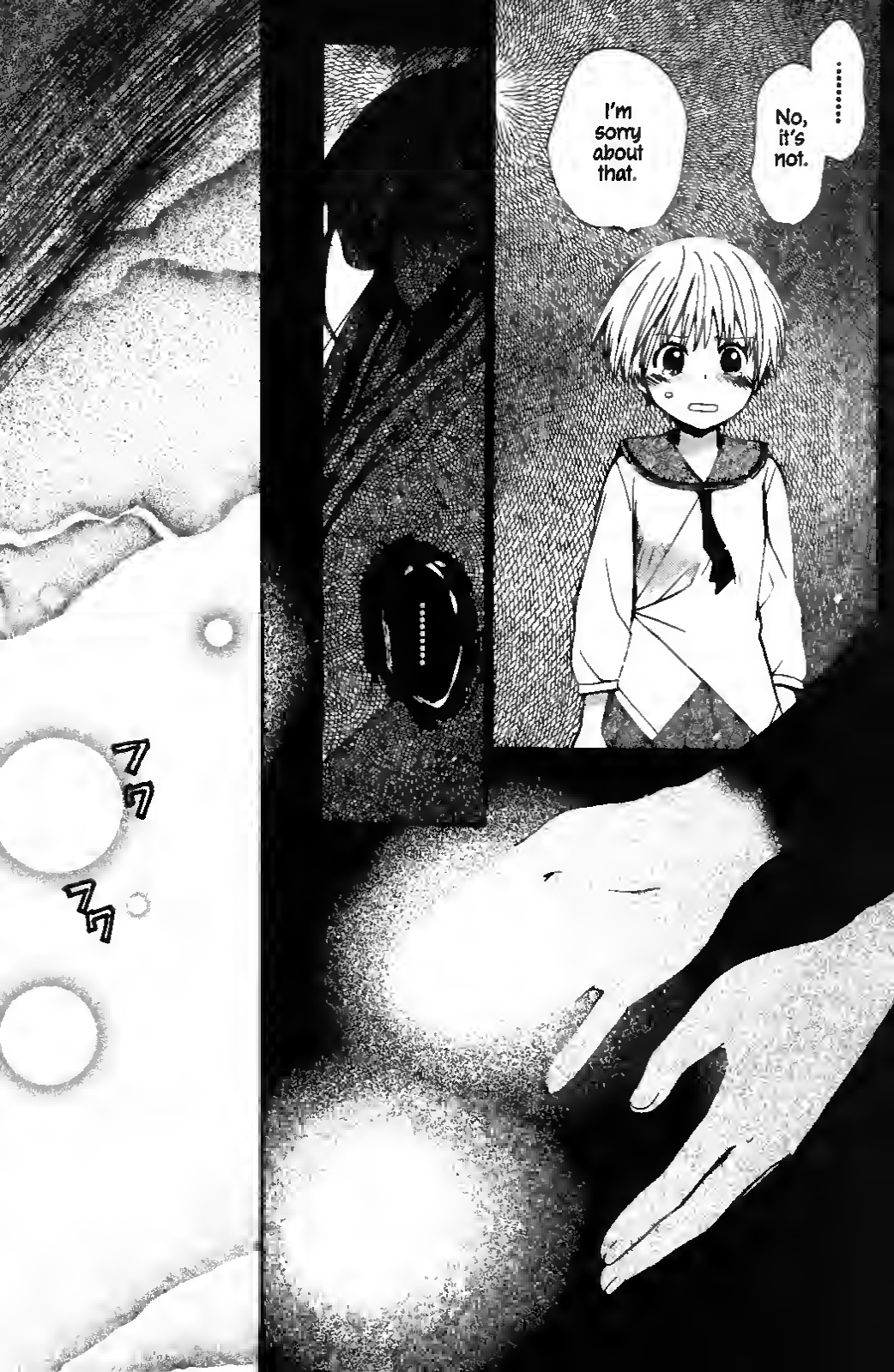
No...
I don't understand!
.....
Cut it out!
Stop saying such crazy things!
Please!
.....
.....
.....
I'm sorry.

This thing I was calling the spinning snake...

...it's actually alive?!
Lock it...
...away?
No.
No, don't do that!

That's ...
...something precious to me, isn't it?
I'm so sorry.
Give it back.
That's why you're asking me.
You're not "spinning snake."
I'm sorry.
In that case, no!

That isn't your name.
It's...
...not?
So give everything back.


No, it's not.
I'm sorry about that.
ククク

I kept running from the fact that my mother, the kindest person I knew...
...had died.
The warmth kept pulling further and further away.
Time passed as though it were punishing me.

The sunset? It's impossible!
Nightfall will always beat me to it.
Toward the setting sun...
I ran and ran.
No one would care if I were dead.
I'm constantly reminded...
...of how pathetic I am.
I hate myself.

--ey...!
Hey!
gasp!
You okay there?
.....
Yusuke-kun--!
.....
You were totally zoned out.
When did you get here?
Huh?

Wha--?!
The shrine gate...
...came crashing down a minute ago.

Is...is Sasuke-kun... alive...?
Yusuke-kun...
.....

Two big floaty, glowing things...
...drifted past me.
I just remembered!
We're supposed to find Sasuke and ask him lots of stuff!
Right, Miiko?!
That's right!
.....
Miiko?
ぎゅ

Miiko...?
Ah...
Nn...
No...
Nngh ...
N-no, no...

And one was Sasuke-kun.
One was Miiko.

I hate myself!
My boring personality, my face, my body...
Everything that makes me who I am!

Shall I...
...lock it all away?
Then I realized I was in a strange place...
...and she was stroking my head as I slept.
"She's not human."
That was my first thought.
She didn't seem to have a name--or feelings.
She understood very simple words.
She was on the brink of fading into darkness.

Always watching it intently.
...always looking at something.
But she was...
.....
She's... always looking at her.
Does she want that girl...?

...for even a moment?
...think that...
...she can take it and lock it away for me.
If I'm in pain, or hot or cold...
If you want that...
...it would be so easy.
Why did I have to...

I'm the one who pulled Fukuta-san out of the human world.
I brought her here.
I have to protect her.
Make sure she enjoys her life in high school.
I've got to protect her...

We can't take him back to school while he's like this.
I wish I could say that, but I'm no expert.

Everything's gonna be fine.

We'll just have to hope he wakes up...
...while we wait for him to get pulled out of school.

Home...
Right. He hasn't gone home in a long time.

Pulled out...?
Yeah. I made the call earlier.
He's going home whether he wants to or not.

Well, I'm glad we found him.
I was scared I'd never see him again if we lost him this time.
.....
I still don't know what he's up to, though.
Sasuke-kun's the reason...
...I didn't get into any other high schools.

I took it out on my family.
It was horrible.
I cried a lot.
Huh?
All the schools my friends went to turned me down.
It was really painful.
I was so stressed and worried that I couldn't focus on anything else. I just stared at my feet...
...while everyone moved on without me.
I started really hating myself.
And now...
...it turns out it was all Sasuke-kun's fault.

"Fukuta-san would never like me that way."
I just don't know anymore.
Um, now I'm the one who's confused.
Let's back up. You figured out something about him?
Yeah, a little.
A little?
Well... Er...
It's...it's like I saw everything.
Every-thing?
Who's his master, then?
His master...?
"I'll protect you."

...I think...
...that lady's gone now.
I think Sasuke-kun knew she was going...
...and tried to disappear along with her.
"...from everyone who makes you lonely."
I don't know about a master, but...

Stroking my head...
...like my mother used to.
.....
Sasuke-kun...
.....
...might cry when he wakes up.

You were awake, huh?
I was checking for a fever.
What?
.....
ガバッ

Hey--!
Don't kill him!
You have a fever! Lie down!
Relax
Oh, no you don't.
I said ...
... no!
.....
Chill, he can take it.
Don't do that again!
Yusuke-kun! Violence is wrong!
.....
Fukuta-san...
You really...
...saw everything?
Hey, did you wake up...
...when she was talking about you getting locked away?

Sorr--
I'm sorry...
...for all of it.
.....
...I see.
.....
Uh huh.
I think so.
Why didn't I just disappear...?!
Yeah, I saw everything.
He regrets so many things.
I did.
I saw Miiko. I saw Sasuke-kun. Every bit of it was real.

Regret is all he has.
Sasuke-kun...
……
How did you feel when I said I liked you?
ピク
I--
……
Oh!
I don't mean you need to answer.
Just... tell me what you thought.
Did it bother you? Or confuse you?
……
Or did you regret that I felt that way...?

I was really happy.
You're the one who told him to relax!
Hey!
Stay down!
Sor --
Oh--!

Love...?
.....
You don't get it.
That's how I show love.
...didn't want you to disappear, Sasuke-kun.
That lady...
Ohh... I understand.

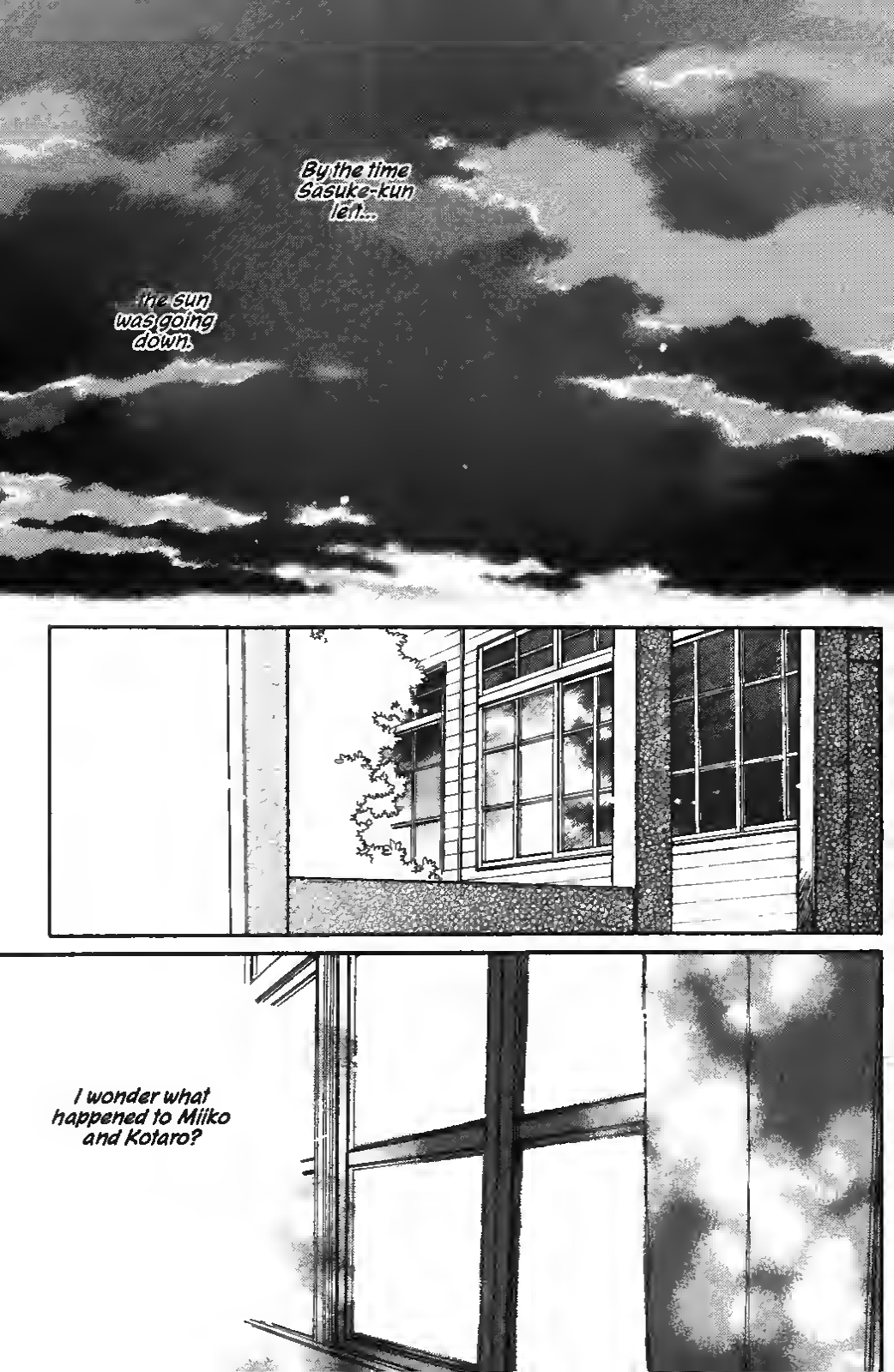
She brought me here to love you!
That's why I'm here!

What're you babbling about?
Feelings don't just change like that!
Yes, they've arrived.
They said they're here to pick up the student who's taking time off, so I let them through.
They know how to deal with this kind of thing.
They'll take care of everything.

There once was a
blank piece of paper.

Final Report
It's All Just Beginning

I'm fine.
I can walk without help.
Um... Handcuffs...?
Yeah. I told you he was being pulled out.
They'll drive him. It'll be fine.
.....
Are they ninjas too?
I can't answer that.
.....
Sasuke-kun will go home and get better, right?


By the time Sasuke-kun left...
the sun was going down.
I wonder what happened to Miiko and Kotaro?

Did Miiko...
...remember what happened to Teruo-san?
I have a bad feeling.
Fune!

Kotaro...
I'm glad you're back.
Hey!
Did Milko slap you again?
Yeah...
Oh! There's a message from Watanuki-sensei.
He says we don't need to worry about Sasuke.
Huh?
He's gonna make an announcement later.
Sasuke doesn't go to this school anymore.
.....
.....

But it's even worse watching my friends leave...
...one by one
.....
Sigh ...
Before I came here, I was a loner.
I didn't know any other magical foxes.

I was so excited...
...when I first got here, but...
There wasn't much I could say when I heard Sasuke-kun had a fever and needed to go home to get better.
But right before he left, he said...
Fukuta-san.

Thank you.
This isn't goodbye forever.
I want to believe that.
Today I hugged Miiko for longer than I ever have before.
Fune.
Hmm?
Huh?
What?

She was crying really hard.
Who's Terva-san?
はぁはぁ
はぁはぁ

No matter how hard I try...
...I'll never ever see him again.
.....
I'm quitting.
Miiko...
.....
So what's the point?
I quit trying to be a human.

The person Miiko loved most...
All her memories of Teruo-san came back.
.....

I figured as much.
.....
That's how Sasuke-kun must've felt too.
Because I wished for it...
...all of Miiko's feelings for Teruo-san were taken away, like none of it ever happened.
Don't pet me.

You aren't human...
...so don't pet me.
You're not Teruo ...!
.....
.....
Don't touch me!
But... Miiko...
...you like being pet, don't you?
Not right now.
.....
Then...

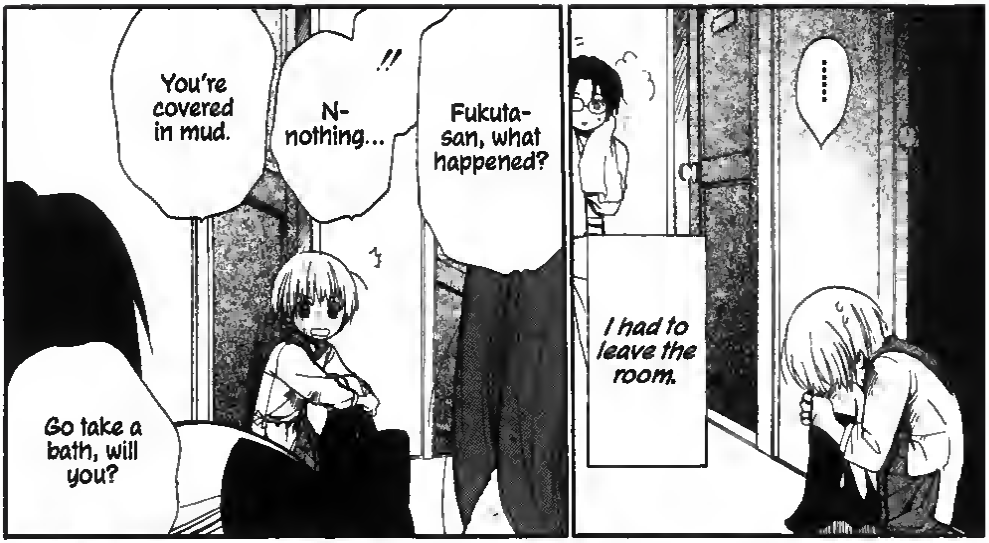
I don't want anything.
I'm not doing this anymore!
...what can I do...
...to help you?
Then...why are you still transformed?
.....
You're transformed too, Fune.
As far as Miiko's concerned...
..."human" means Teruo-san, and "Teruo-san" means human.

No, I'm not.
!
He's the only human she really believes in.
I'm a human.

If she understands that I'm a human...
This isn't a dream or a lie or anything
It's the truth.

I'm sorry for lying to you.
But I still...
...want to be your friend.
I can't ever replace him.
I know...
I know that.
So this is...
.....
...it's selfish...
...but is that possible?

……
ぽんっ
POOF


You're covered in mud.
!!
N-nothing...
Fukuta-san, what happened?
Go take a bath, will you?
.....
I had to leave the room.

Mud...

"Don't pet me."
I guess I'm not good enough.
I can't touch Miiko's heart.
.....
Carrot
Took a bath.

Miiko came to this school...
...and met me.
We lived in the same room.
We were in the same class.
Carrot
But still...

•Carrot
...excited when I started here too.
I was...

It wasn't just you, Kotaro.
Carrot
buzz, buzz...
Huh?

No, I'm fine--
Achoo!
Sure you are.
Sensei!
What's up, Fukuta?
You'll catch a cold out here.
I didn't get to see him either.
.....
I see.
I heard.
So ...
...it sounds like Sasuke left.
I thought maybe you were sad because you couldn't find him.
But if he has health issues, there's nothing for it.
That's what the headmaster said.
Sensei ...
.....
He could have talked things over with me...
He was always so quiet, and I never knew why...

I just came out to get some air, but the stars are so beautiful.
I decided to take a walk.
You're right about the stars.
Er...
Thanks anyway...
Don't dwell on it for too long. Find a distraction.
How about more homework?
A long time ago I saw an anime that said...
...you become a star when you die.
Do you believe some meetings are fate?
Teruo-san...

Are you okay?
Y-yes!
My foot slipped, that's all.
Fukuta?!
?!!
Aaahhh!
What's wrong with me?
I'm so pathetic ...
About fate...
I do believe in it.
Huh?
You're sure you're okay? Want to see the nurse?
I'm fine. Sorry about that.

Don't you think that counts?
If you live long enough you'll meet people you can't forget.
People you can't forget...
.....
When I was a student here, I had a human classmate.
A boy.
Well ...
Like who?
I wonder how he's doing.
Yeah. I thought so, anyway. He was hard to figure out.
.....
You guys were friends?

I don't know if I'll ever see him again...
...but I do know I'll never forget him.

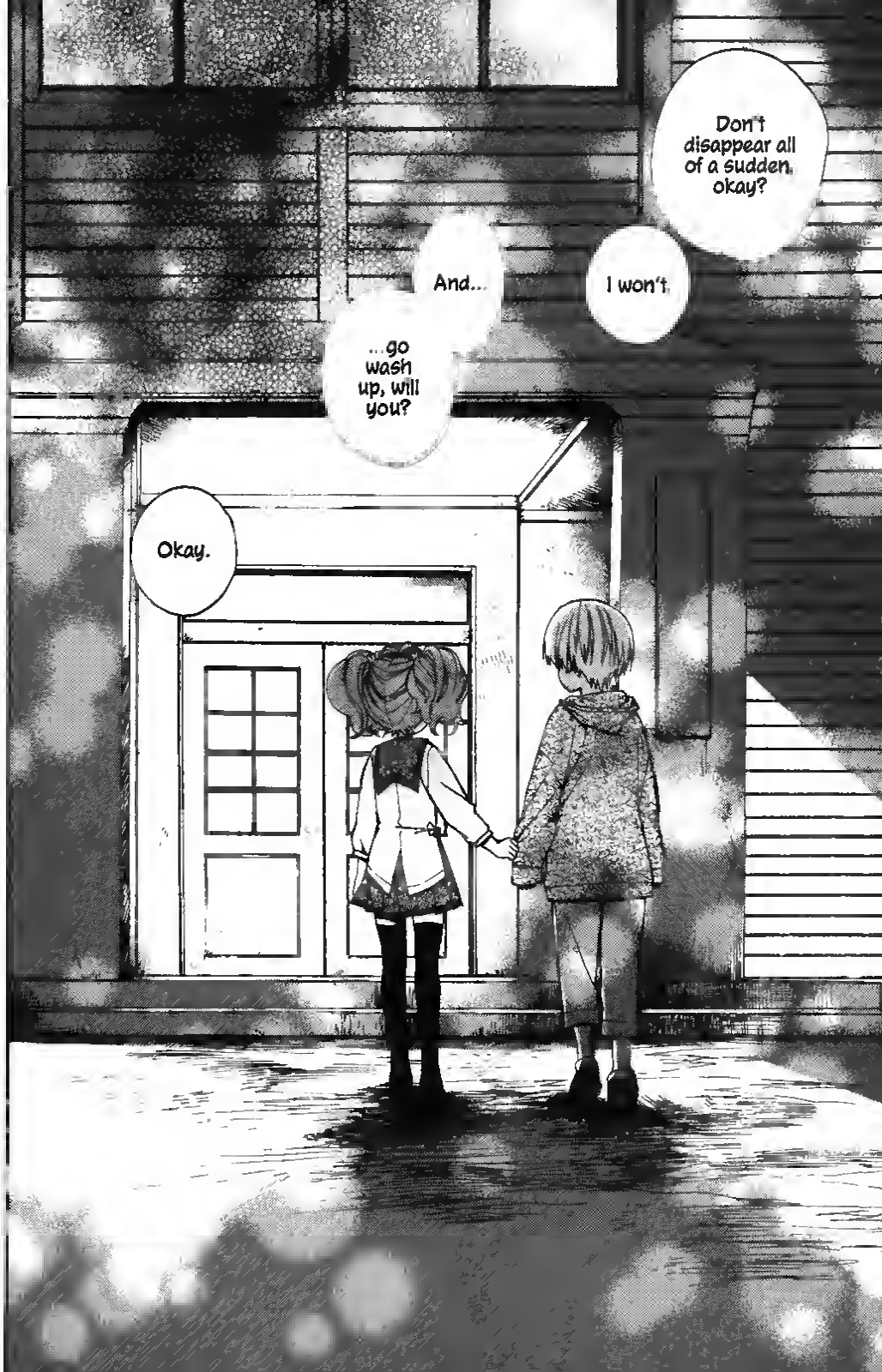
See you tomorrow.
Thanks! Good night!
I'm... ...going back to the dorm!
S-sure.
Watch your step.
They all have to find their own answers.
It's kind of arrogant to think I can affect that.
But that doesn't matter!
If nothing else...

.....
Miiko--!
...I...
...want to be here for them!

You were...
... looking for me?
?
I couldn't find you.
Um... what is it?
Whew

I don't understand, but...
She doesn't believe me...
.....
You said you're a human. I don't get it.
Did I...
...you are my friend.

...manage to...
...move her heart a little?
.....
I don't know, but...
Uh huh.
...I'm so glad she came out of the room to tell me that.
Fune...


Don't disappear all of a sudden, okay?
I won't.
And...
...go wash up, will you?
Okay.

About Sasuke... Was he really sick?
Yeah.
Next we'll go after info on the culture festival!
Let's [illegible]p scoring points!
Great! We've got Sasuke's leaving and the broken shrine gate at the edge of campus.
There's nothing else we need to report today, right?
Yeah! Our younger members don't need to know that we're spying on the school and reporting to the headmaster...
...until it's time for them to start running the club themselves.
We don't need to dig any deeper.
He'd just wonder why we're nosing around.
We could ask Yusuke.
You think?
So about the gate that fell down...
What was it there to honor?
Good point!
That's why you're supposed to keep it to yourself.

After she ceased to be "headmaster"...

...she'd been all alone.

For decades...

Maybe even centuries.

I might just be imagining it...
...but the woman who vanished may have been the headmaster from a long time ago.
She eventually even lost her name...
...but after all this, she was finally able to disappear.
That's what I believe.
And since then...

...I haven't dreamed about the spinning snake once.
Library
This is something we all decided to do.
Let's ask Sensei later.
I can't read this!
Y-yeah!
Hey! You guys are looking, right?

Our class decided to do a play for the festival.
It seemed like the most exciting option out were given.
TV
But some people wanted to make up our own play, and others wanted to find a good one.
Um... I could just choose something.
I was hoping it'd be easy to find something interesting...
...but this'll be tough.
Tons of books.
Urgh... These are just records.
Hmm...
No stories here.
I found it...!
Huh?
What'd you find?
Teruo Suzuhara (Age 29)

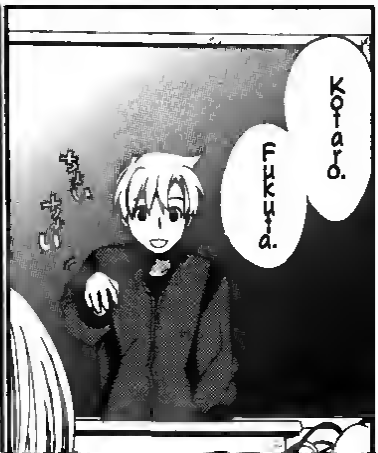
Yeah.

Fune...
I'm gonna become a human.
I want to be like Teruo was. Be worthy of him.

I'm gonna try my best.

Good morning!
Bow.
Every-one stand up.
White-1

These are addressed to you.
Here.


Kotaro.
Fukuya.

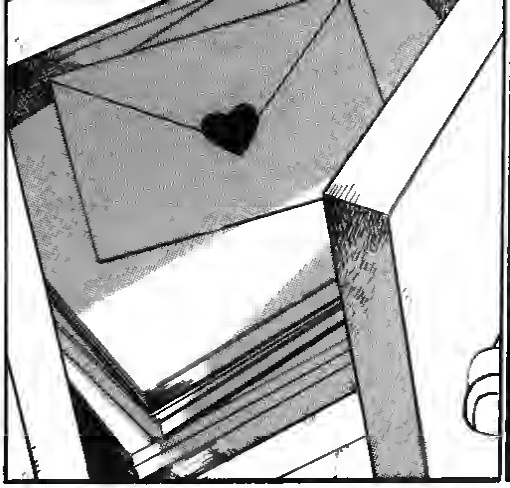
Yuichi Takuma
addressed?
?
Yuichi
Yuichi
Listen up, everyone!
We've received a letter from our old classmate, Yuichi Takuma.

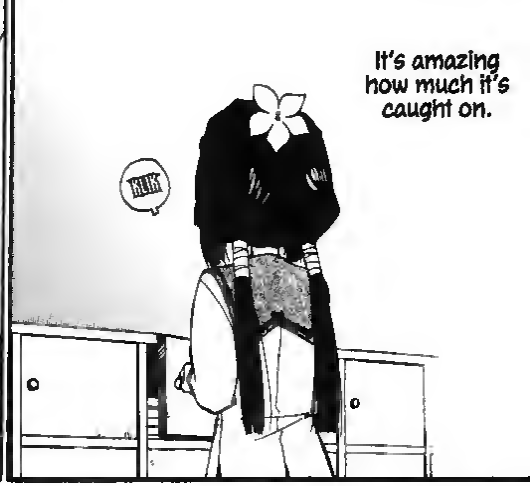
Let's see what he says!
I'll explain more later.
A letter is someone's words on paper.
It's a way to tell people how you feel without speaking to them.
I'm about to read Takuma's words to you.
What's a letter?
Where is he--?
Takuma? Yuichi Takuma?!
Wow!
"I'm sorry for leaving so suddenly and not saying goodbye."
"Dear friends..."
"...in the first-year white class."
Dear Neko Fukuta,
It's been a while. How have
When I left Morimori it wa
and I'm really sorry for ca
I'm embarrassed to say tha
But I feel a lot more relaxe
doing really well.
I also said this in the letter
going to a new school. It's not th
didn't want to come back to Morimo
really want you to know that. And t
How is Suzuhara-san to
fukuta-san to
It's really.
"How are you all doing? I'm going to a different school now."

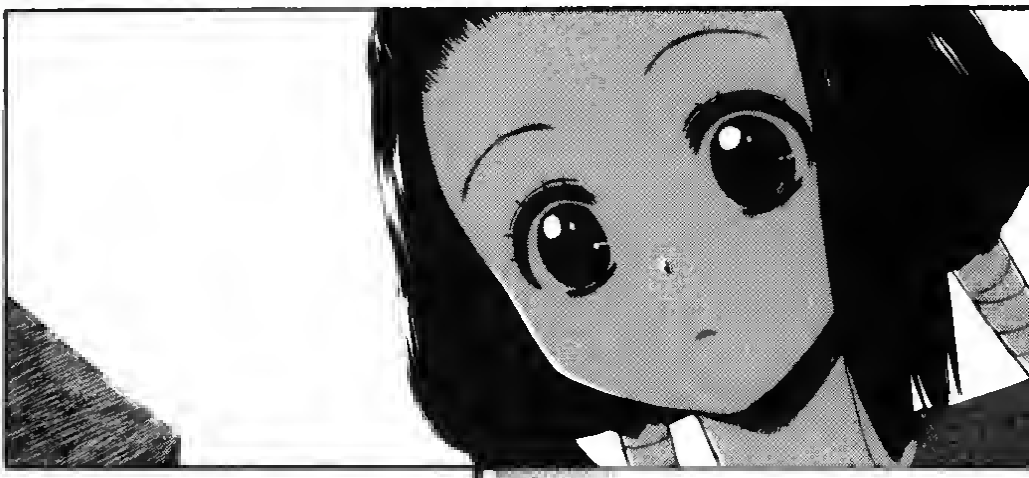
To Kotaro,
Let's see each other again when we're both human. You better study hard!
Yuichi Takuma
Why's he being so formal?
That's so like him.
Letters always make you formal extra polite
I could read the whole thing!

Dear Yuichi Takuma,
Thank you so much for the letter!
I will try to write formally,
like you did.
Sorry in advance if it doesn't
come off that way.
I was so happy to receive your letter.

It's all thanks to you.
Everyone in school is doing it.
...and sending them to other classes.
Friends are exchanging letters...
Ever since you wrote to us, writing letters has become the big thing here.



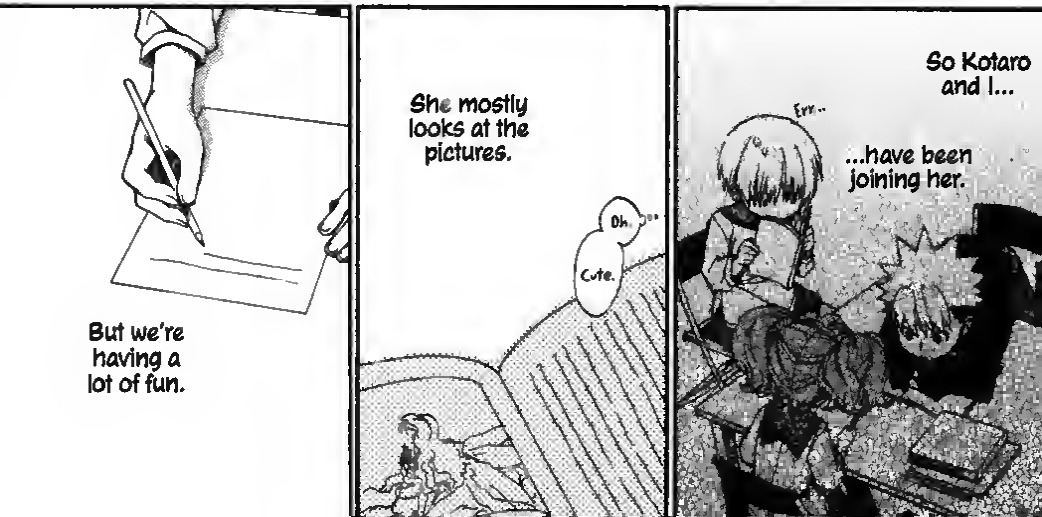




So now love letters are the big thing.

Time has been flying by!
Maybe because of the culture festival.
Even though I'm in the ninja club...
Zenda's been getting tons of 'em.
I'm attracting attention...
Ha ha!
Yeah, you heard me.
Love letters?
Love letters?!

Milko has been looking at a lot of books lately, even if she can't read them.


But we're having a lot of fun.
She mostly looks at the pictures.
Oh...
Cute.
So Kotaro and I...
Err..
...have been joining her.

I'm putting Kotaro's letter in with mine.
You take care too, Takuma-kun.
I have to make sure I don't catch any colds, though.
And I'm doing really well.
Finally finished!
That took days to write...
Thank you for everything ...
And... done!

.....
Thank you for every-thing...
... hmm?
Sasuke?

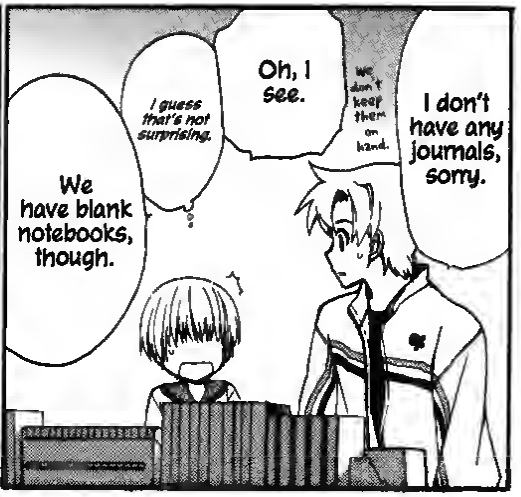
Uh...
Oh.
He'll probably come.
Meaning what, exactly?
Team up?
Well, we got a letter asking if we'd like to team up, but...
Take on a covert mission as a team.
...he'd probably rather not.
I bet...
...he comes back.
.....
.....
Fune?
You sure like to gamble.
Wanna bet on it?
You think so?
Yep.

Oh...
What?
Nothing.
.....
...always reminds me.
Looking at the sunset...
And even the hall on the second floor.
Same with the art room.

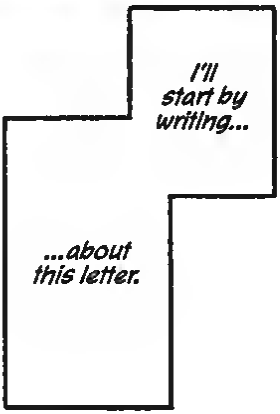
It all gave me a great idea.
I want to write about everything!
About the day I started here.
About the dorms.
About my family.
About the club.
About my teachers.

About my friends.
About the person I like.

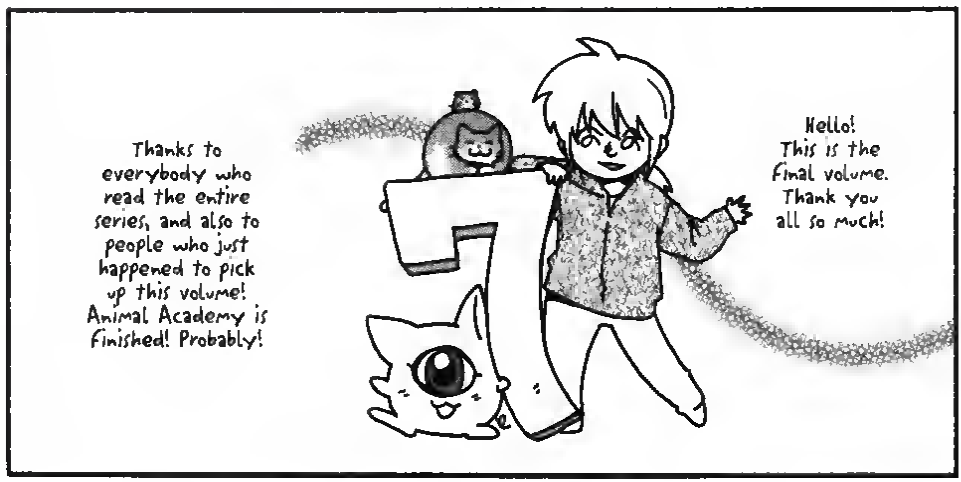
Oh, right!
Perfect timing, Fukuta!
Okay... I'll take one of those.
Thank you.

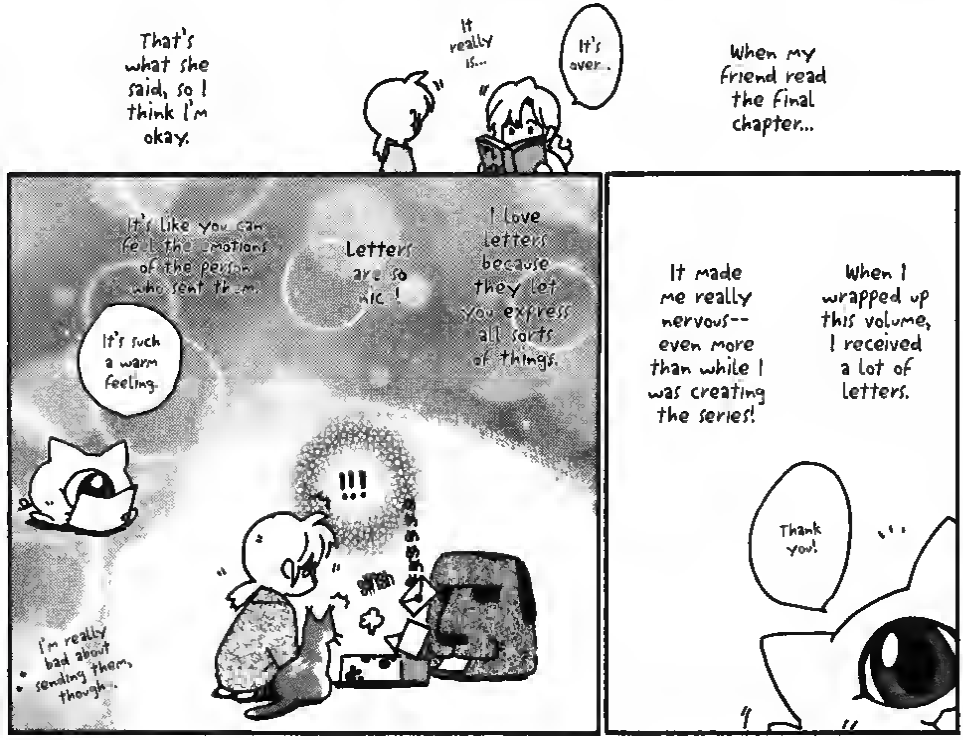

I don't have any journals, sorry.
We don't keep them on hand.
Oh, I see.
I guess that's not surprising.
We have blank notebooks, though.

There's a letter here for you!


I'll start by writing...
...about this letter.

Postscript [7]





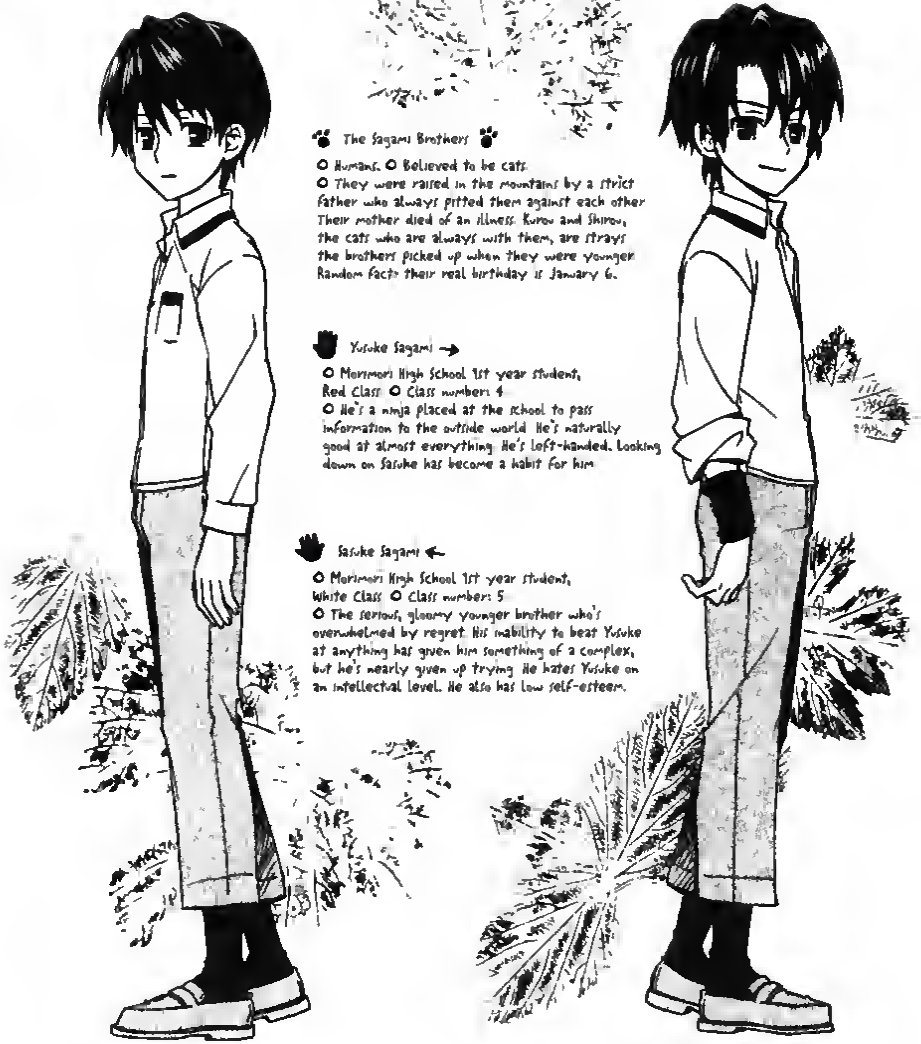
Thank you!

I hope we can see each other again in the future! See ya!

So much happened along the way, but I am so thankful to everyone who supported me and helped me: my friends and family, my editor, anyone I made work for and, of course, my fans.

Thank yous
- I nami
- O. miwa
- K. miwa
- M. yu-ki
- T. tomoko
- W. satiko
- My editor

And many more!



The Sagami Brothers

○ Human. ○ Believed to be cats.
○ They were raised in the mountains by a strict father who always pitted them against each other. Their mother died of an illness. Kurou and Shirou, the cats who are always with them, are strays the brothers picked up when they were younger. Random fact: their real birthday is January 6.

Yusuke Sagami →

○ Morimori High School 1st year student, Red Class ○ Class number: 4
○ He's a ninja placed at the school to pass information to the outside world. He's naturally good at almost everything. He's left-handed. Looking down on Sasuke has become a habit for him.

Sasuke Sagami ←

○ Morimori High School 1st year student, White Class ○ Class number: 5
○ The serious, gloomy younger brother who's overwhelmed by regret. His inability to beat Yusuke at anything has given him something of a complex, but he's nearly given up trying. He hates Yusuke on an intellectual level. He also has low self-esteem.

WARNING
Never choke anyone.
It's very painful.
And no playing cowboys either.
Yeah, you could make someone stop breathing.
You'll screw up if you do it wrong.
And it's a crime to choke anyone but your brother.
Right?
Hey! Being brothers doesn't make it okay! Somebody could die!
C'mon, it's just a brotherly fight.
He'll die!
Always #1
Always #2